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WASHINGTON - More heroin from Afghanistan is hitting U.S. city streets, five years after the United States toppled the country's fundamentalist Taliban regime.

The surge comes as Afghanistan's opium production reached an all-time high last year despite attempts by the United States and its allies to beat back a resurgence of the Taliban and to reduce poppy cultivation.

Almost 90 percent of the world's opium is made from poppies grown in Afghanistan. Once refined, most of the heroin is shipped throughout Europe. As a result, the Afghan drug trade has been portrayed primarily as a European problem, rather than an American one.

But internal drug-enforcement reports indicate that U.S. authorities are seizing more Afghan heroin at U.S. ports and from low-level dealers in American cities.

The reports contradict the public statements of drug enforcement officials, who maintain that the amount of heroin reaching the United States from Afghanistan hasn't increased.

"Based on everything I've seen, the amount of heroin coming to the United States from Afghanistan has pretty much stayed the same," Joseph Keefe, an assistant deputy director with the Office of National Drug Control Policy, said in an interview.

Drug Enforcement Administration spokesman Steve Robertson echoed that assessment: "We're not seeing any increase being reflected in our intelligence."

However, U.S. officials have privately told their Afghan counterparts and some American lawmakers that they've detected an increase in the amount of heroin from Afghanistan.

"We have talked about these problems and this increase," said M. Ashraf Haidari, the first secretary of the Afghan Embassy in Washington. "It's logical that where there is demand there is a supply. Drugs from Afghanistan are making their way to the United States."

U.S. Rep. Mark Steven Kirk, a Republican who represents suburbs north of Chicago, said the Bush administration had been slow to respond to indications that more heroin from Afghanistan was coming to the United States. U.S. law enforcement officials also have told him privately that Afghanistan's share of the American heroin market is growing, he said.

"More heroin is definitely coming in from Afghanistan," said Kirk, who's visited Afghanistan as a reserve naval intelligence officer. "The problem is the official reporting lags as to what we're actually seeing in the streets."

The increase in the U.S. supply of Afghan heroin is further evidence that Afghanistan is awash in illicit opium and plagued by official corruption.

The United Nations has concluded that drug corruption in the country is widespread and entrenched. Last year, opium production reached historic levels, increasing 50 percent.

"The problem of narcotics in Afghanistan is a problem of national security for the United States," said Haidari, of the Afghan Embassy, who noted that "drugs finance terrorism."

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, a California Democrat who serves on the Judiciary Committee, said that although Congress had set aside \$150 million last year for drug interdiction in Afghanistan "the results of that investment are not yet known."

"Any boost in the use of Afghanistan heroin at home is a matter of concern," she said.

The administration's silence on the matter makes it difficult to assess the scope of the problem, however.

Most heroin in the United States continues to come from Mexico and Colombia, experts said. Also, heroin addiction isn't as pervasive in the United States as cocaine and methamphetamine addiction.

But a DEA internal analysis found that 14 percent of the heroin seized in the United States in 2004 originated in Afghanistan, compared with 8 percent the year before. DEA officials refused to provide 2005 figures, saying they were still preliminary.

Seth Jones, an Afghanistan expert with the RAND Corp., a research center based in Santa Monica, Calif., said the 2004 report showed a significant increase in the DEA's seizures of heroin from Afghanistan but that the number could simply reflect incompetent drug traffickers whose shipments are being detected.

"The drug trade is murky," Jones said. "There's no perfect way to get a sense of what's being smuggled in."